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Committee on Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human resources

**“To Do No Harm: Strategies For Preventing Prescription Drug Abuse”**

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The state of Florida has seen an alarming increase in the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs in recent years. Most specifically OxyContin and others that contain its active ingredient Oxycodone. The Controlled Substances Act has placed Oxycodone under Schedule II due to its highly addictive potential.

OxyContin is a drug with two identities. An FDA approved schedule II drug developed for treatment of long term moderate to severe pain, and a substance that can be used by the heroin addict due to its similar euphoric effect. OxyContin also provides the heroin user with the security of a predictable potency in a regulated dosage unit. There are instances of the OxyContin abuser switching to heroin in some parts of the state

Abusing an OxyContin tablet is easily accomplished by chewing the tablet thereby voiding its controlled-release feature. The tablet can be crushed and snorted, or made soluble and injected. It is often mixed with other licit and illicit drugs which can prove very deadly.

In 2002 there were 589 drug deaths in the state of Florida in which Oxycodone was found in the system. Oxycodone was found in lethal amounts in 256 of these.

During the first six months of 2003 there were 292 deaths involving Oxycodone. It was found in fatal amounts in 136 persons 48 of whom were central Florida residents.

Of the 136 Oxycodone fatalities in the first half of 2003 67% were over the age of 35 and 16% were over the age of 50.

Intelligence indicates doctor shopping, prescription fraud, and robbery, are the three most common means of obtaining OxyContin.

The heroin problem in central Florida has certainly contributed to the abuse of OxyContin and other drugs containing Oxycodone. Further, the lack of availability or increase in price of one, motivates the abuser to seek the other.

I cannot recall a substance so diversely abused, crossing all age groups, ethnicities, and social statuses, with such a devastating effect. We know the source of this drug, the retail price, the illicit price, the distribution routes, and very much about the end user and his supplier.

I refer to the November 2003 article in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel which lists the top twelve (12) OxyContin prescribers for Medicaid during 2000 to 2002. These twelve doctors wrote prescriptions totaling \$15,645,745.00. This figure represents 1,689,605 80 mg. tablets of OxyContin or 9,540,000 10 mg. tablets.

Should our efforts to bring this abuse under control not start here?

The Florida Prescription Validation Program utilizing an electronic database containing prescription history and counterfeit-proof prescription forms will certainly assist in curbing doctor shopping and forged prescriptions.

The validation program in cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Administrations Office of Diversion Control, and its registry of physicians prescribing controlled substances, should be a natural alliance.